



MANAGE Musings No: 02

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MANAGE Musings

A knowledge-sharing series that brings together the insights, perspectives and experiences of MANAGE to shape ideas, inspire dialogue and drive meaningful action

Fostering Innovation and Collaboration to Strengthen India's Agri-Startup Ecosystem

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)

(An Autonomous Organization of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Govt. of India)

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Innovation rarely succeeds in isolation. It thrives when ideas meet opportunities, entrepreneurs meet mentors, customers meet service providers, development departments collaborate with potential partners, and successful startups inspire aspiring entrepreneurs. Guided by this understanding, MANAGE-CIA has developed a series of stakeholder engagement initiatives that connect Agri-startups with the wider agricultural innovation ecosystem, creating spaces where collaboration becomes as important as innovation itself.

At the heart of this movement is MANAGE-Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA), a Centre of Excellence in Agribusiness Incubation and a Knowledge Partner under Pradhan Mantri - Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY), which has incubated 734 agri-startups and mentored 1,293 agripreneurs across 26 States and Union Territories spanning diverse domains within agriculture and allied sectors.

<https://www.manage.gov.in/managecia/Default.aspx>

When the Country Paused, **We-Launch**ed



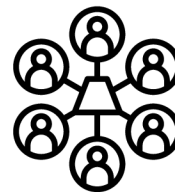
12

Events



109

Startups from 18
States



1782

Stakeholders from
28 States

"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

- Albert Einstein

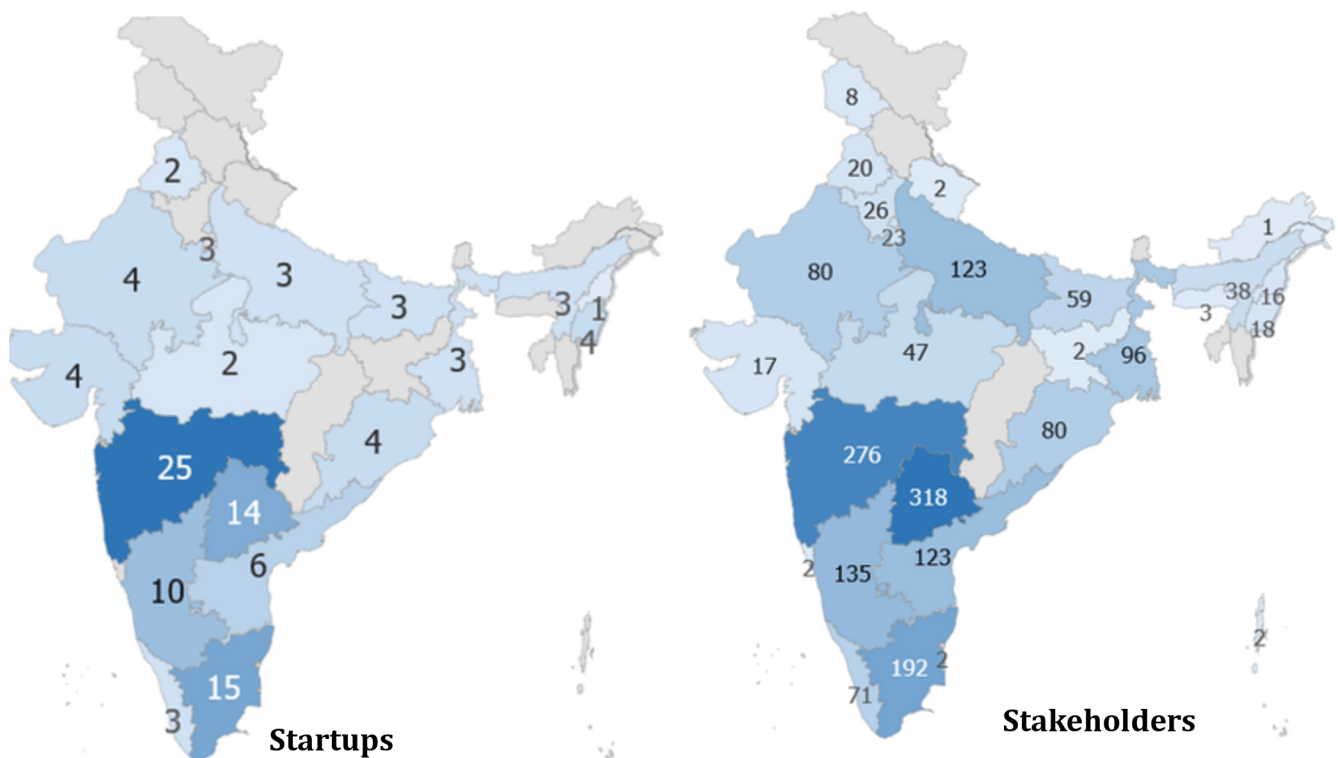
The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, bringing product launches, networking events, investor meetings, and business exhibitions to an abrupt halt. For Agri-startups, which rely on stakeholder interactions, product demonstrations, and institutional linkages, these disruptions limited opportunities to grow their businesses.

Rather than allowing its startups to lose momentum, the MANAGE-CIA leveraged digital technology to sustain entrepreneurial engagement through the MANAGE e-Launch Series, launched on 6 August 2021. The initiative provided Market-ready Agri-startups with a platform to showcase their products and services before an arena of stakeholders, enabling them to enhance their visibility, expand professional networks, establish institutional linkages, and explore opportunities for business growth.

Beyond addressing the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic, the MANAGE e-Launch Series demonstrated the potential of virtual engagement as a cost-effective approach to expanding the visibility of Agri-startups while facilitating targeted interactions with stakeholders relevant to their business needs. Over the following eight months, from August 2021 to March 2022, the series expanded rapidly; MANAGE conducted 10 e-Launch events, featuring 109 Agri-startups from 18 states and attracting 1,782 stakeholders from 28 states across India.

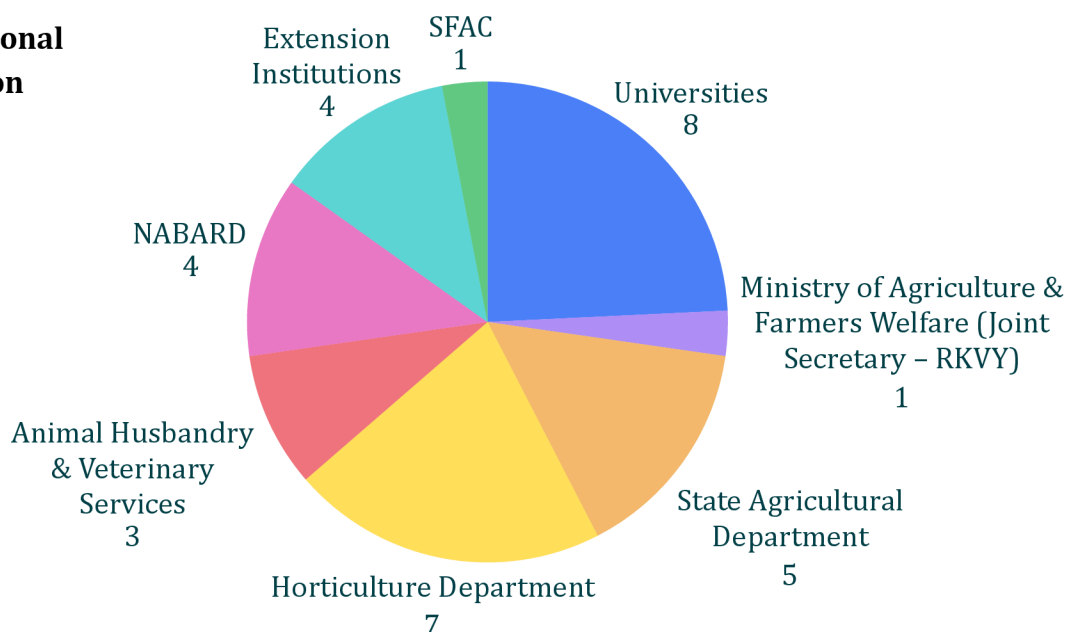


Watch the MANAGE e-Launch Series in action:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSm--jr0UJQ&list=PLMo-iyYCszp9Hv2zQeIQA1GiQ-ARm91YQ>

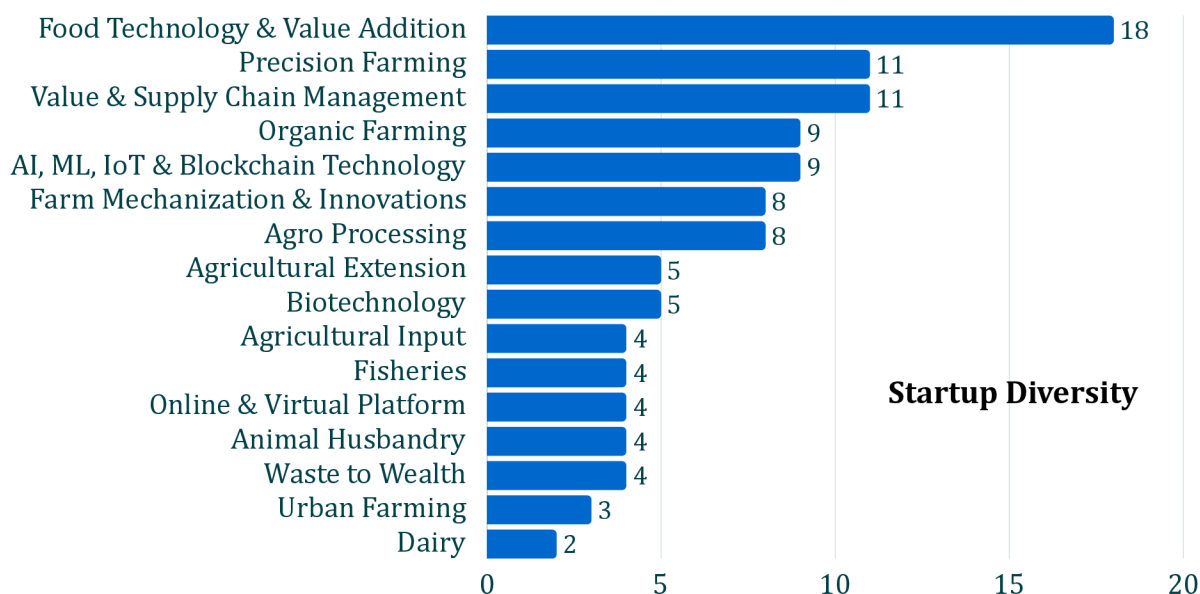


State-wise Participation

Multi-Institutional Participation



The MANAGE e-Launch Series followed a structured schedule, with each participating Agri-startup allotted five minutes to showcase innovative products and services addressing farmers' challenges across diverse domains of agriculture. The significance of the e-Launch Series, however, extended well beyond these brief presentations. Its strength lay in its multi-institutional participation, bringing together stakeholders from a broad cross-section of the agricultural innovation ecosystem, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, state departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Animal Husbandry, Agricultural universities, ICAR institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), NABARD, SFAC, investors, venture capitalists, banking institutions, incubation centres, mentors, farmers and Agri-business professionals. By convening these stakeholders on a common platform, the e-Launch Series created pathways for Agri-startups to establish collaborations with research institutions, government departments, financial organisations, and industry partners. It also facilitated market linkages and enabled entrepreneurs to build connections with state and central government officials, contributing to the development of a stronger and more integrated Agri-business ecosystem.



Startup Diversity

Taking Collaboration to the Ground

As pandemic-related restrictions eased, MANAGE-CIA expanded this approach by introducing the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program, a physical engagement initiative designed to strengthen interactions within the agricultural innovation ecosystem, particularly in states with limited startup networks, institutional connectivity, and entrepreneurial support systems.

Building on the foundation established by the e-Launch Series, the programme shifted the focus from virtual outreach to direct stakeholder engagement. Rather than serving solely as a platform for startup presentations, it created opportunities for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and improved the reach of Agri-startups to farming communities through locally relevant collaborations among entrepreneurs, policymakers, government departments, research institutions, public and private extension agencies, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), incubators, investors, and other Agri-business stakeholders.

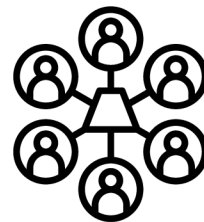
Between February 2024 and September 2026, MANAGE-CIA collaborated with a diverse range of higher education and research institutions across 12 states, encompassing State Agricultural Universities, Central Universities, State Universities, Private Universities, and ICAR research institutes to organise the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program. During this period, the initiative engaged 373 Agri-startups and 2,994 participants through a series of state-level events



12
Events



373
Startups



2994
Stakeholders

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." - Aristotle

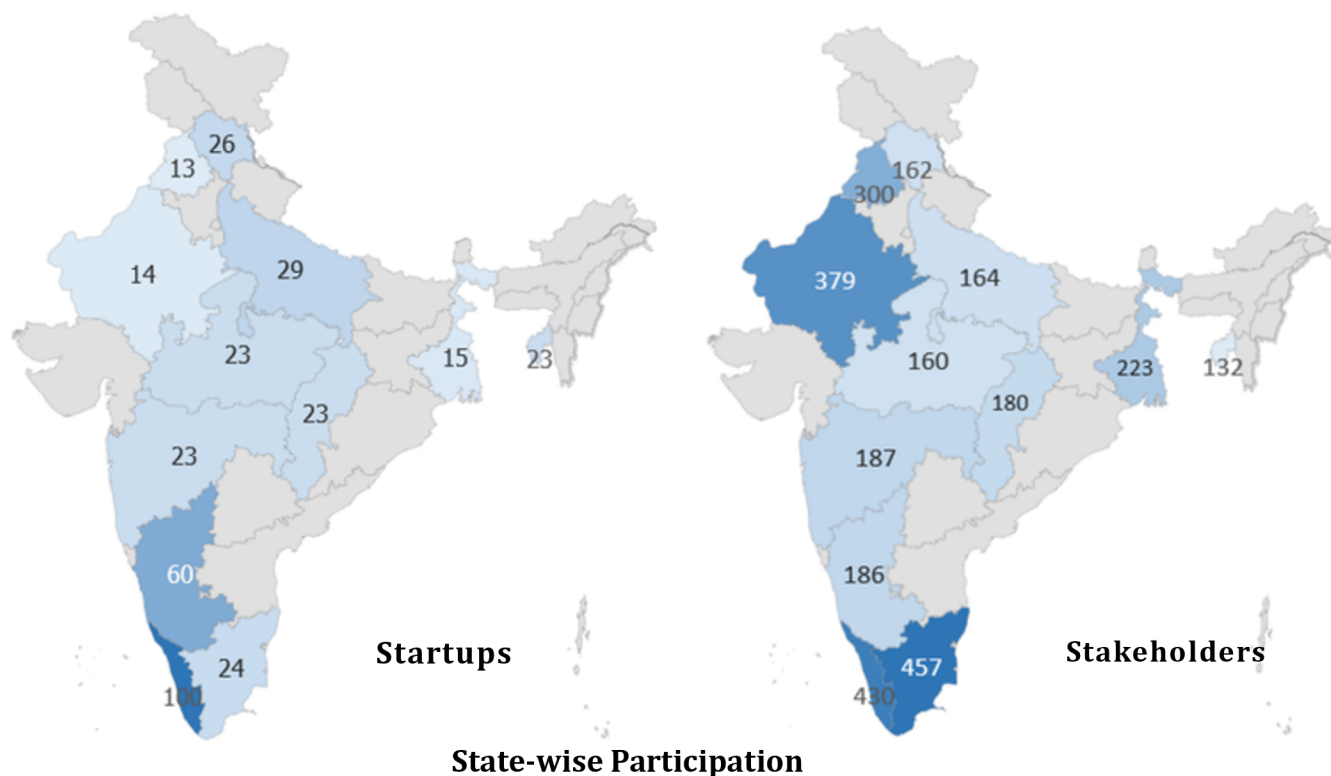
What It Takes to Bring an Ecosystem Together

Every edition of the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program begins two to three months before participants arrive at the venue. Since the programme is organised in different states, planning starts by identifying a suitable local partner institution willing to collaborate and share resources, including infrastructure and other institutional facilities. These collaborations play a crucial role in selecting an accessible venue, identifying promising Agri-startups, and connecting with the state's entrepreneurial and institutional ecosystem. Once the host institution is finalised, preparations expand to include stakeholder mapping and outreach. Senior government officials, policymakers, investors, financial institutions, incubators, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), extension agencies, aspiring agripreneurs and other ecosystem partners are invited to participate, ensuring that the event brings together organisations capable of supporting startup growth. At the same time, publicity materials, exhibition spaces, and event logistics are coordinated to create an environment that encourages interaction between entrepreneurs and stakeholders.

MANAGE-CIA also actively involves its interns in the planning and execution of these programmes, providing them with practical exposure and a better understanding of the Agri-startup ecosystem. This hands-on experience equips them with the skills, confidence, and perspectives needed to become the next generation of agri-business leaders and changemakers.

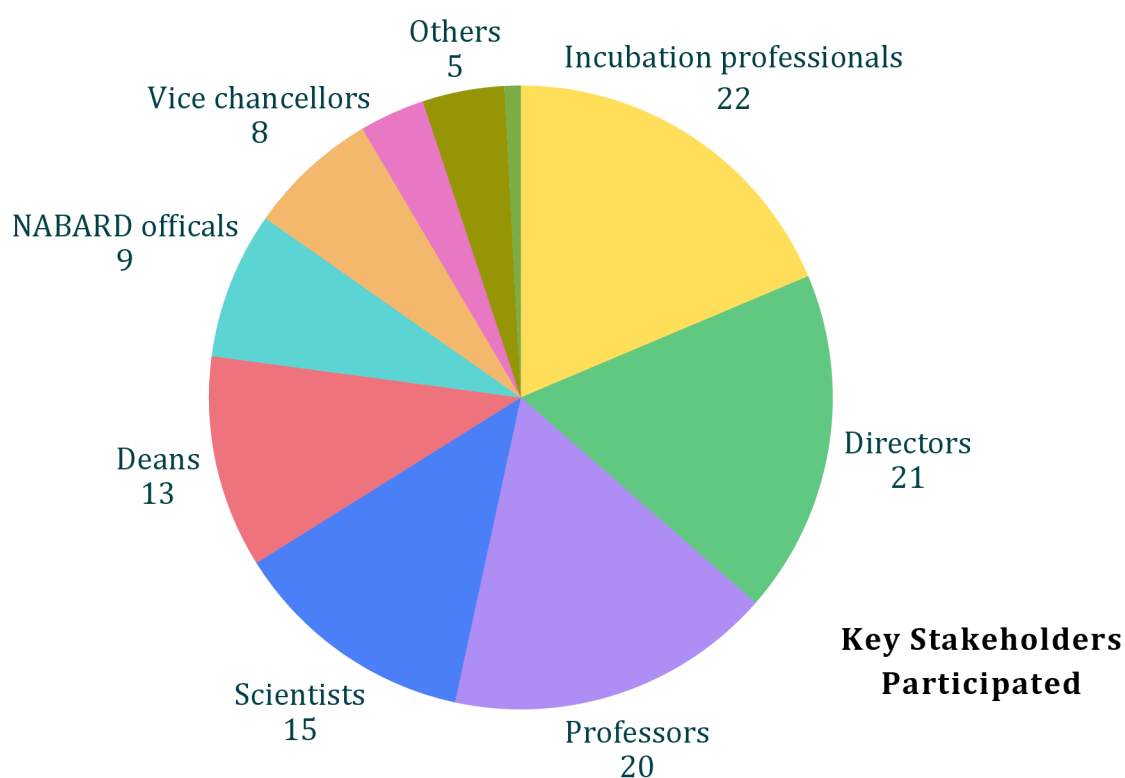
The programme transforms these preparations into a collaborative platform where startup exhibitions, discussions, pitching and networking activities take place simultaneously in a single day. While entrepreneurs present their innovations, stakeholders explore opportunities for collaboration, investment, institutional support, and market linkages.

The event therefore functions not merely as a showcase of agricultural innovations but as a meeting point where ideas, organisations, and opportunities converge. Conducting the programme across multiple states has also strengthened MANAGE's collaborative network with universities, incubation centres, and government agencies. With each edition, the planning process has become more streamlined, institutional partnerships have deepened, and the programme has evolved into a replicable model for fostering state-level Agri-startup ecosystems.



Catalysing Learning and Collaboration

At its core, the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program is designed to bring together the diverse actors that shape the agricultural innovation ecosystem to bridge information gaps and facilitate the seamless exchange of ideas. Each event is further enriched by the participation of distinguished Chief Guests, Guests of Honour and speakers drawn from government, industry, and the incubation community. Their presence provides participants with valuable perspectives on the evolving landscape of agricultural entrepreneurship.



The programme combines startup presentations with knowledge-sharing sessions on emerging agricultural technologies, evolving market trends, and innovative business models. Interactive workshops led by industry experts, successful entrepreneurs, and domain specialists provide participants with practical exposure to enterprise development, enabling startups to gain insights that can be applied beyond the event. Equally important are the interactions among founders themselves, where entrepreneurs exchange experiences, discuss common challenges, and learn from one another's journeys. Such peer-to-peer learning enables startups to benefit from collective experiences, reducing the need to solve problems in isolation and allowing them to focus on innovation.

Across the events, more than 2,185 students and aspiring entrepreneurs participated, gaining first-hand exposure to the agricultural innovation ecosystem and its diverse stakeholders. This experience broadens their understanding of agricultural entrepreneurship as a viable career pathway and helps cultivate a future pipeline of innovators capable of contributing to India's evolving Agri-startup ecosystem.

Although the programme is conducted primarily in physical mode, its reach is further expanded through live streaming, news coverage, and social media dissemination. These efforts extend the programme's visibility beyond the venue, enabling a wider audience to engage with startup innovations and strengthening awareness of the Agri-startup ecosystem. For instance, the Agri-StartUp Stakeholders Connect, organised by MANAGE-CIA in collaboration with Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya (BCKV), West Bengal, received extensive coverage through Krishibarta's Facebook and YouTube channels, generating more than 3,90,000 cumulative views as of September 25, 2026 on social media and reaching farmers, students, researchers, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders across the state.



Access the State-wise Programme Reports:

<https://www.manage.gov.in/manage/cia/CIAASSP.aspx>

From Exhibits to Engagement

Beyond the formal sessions, the exhibition area served as an interactive space where Agri-startups showcased their products, technologies, and prototypes. The exhibition enabled stakeholders to explore innovations firsthand, interact directly with founders, and discuss potential applications, collaborations, or business opportunities through one-to-one conversations. This informal setting complemented the structured programme by encouraging deeper engagement between entrepreneurs and prospective partners.

The startup pitching sessions added another dimension to the programme. Selected founders presented their entrepreneurial journeys, highlighted the problems their innovations sought to address, and shared their growth strategies before a diverse audience. More than a product presentation, these sessions offered startups an opportunity to communicate their vision, receive feedback, and initiate conversations that could lead to future partnerships.

The Importance of Sustained Ecosystem Engagement: The Satatgram Story

A compelling example of the value of sustained ecosystem engagement is the journey of Satatgram Last-Mile Mobility LLP (<https://www.satatgram.com/about.html>), a Jaipur-based Agri-FinTech startup founded by Mr. Chintu Kinger. Satatgram works to improve access to farm mechanization and responsible financial services for small and marginal farmers and rural communities through digital platforms and human-assisted centres. With a presence across Rajasthan covering more than 55,000 villages, the startup aims to extend its reach to one lakh villages. Satatgram’s association with the MANAGE-CIA ecosystem began through MANAGE Agri Eureka 2024. Although the startup did not win the competition, the exposure connected founder Chintu Kinger with the wider MANAGE-CIA ecosystem and opened opportunities for continued engagement. He subsequently participated in the Pre-Incubation Mentoring Program and the Digital Marketing Programme for Agri-startups, gaining valuable mentoring and skills to support business growth. Regular participation in the MANAGE-CIA Saturday Webinar Series further provided access to knowledge, experts and emerging opportunities.

This continued engagement led to new market opportunities. Through the webinar series, Mr. Kinger learned about the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program in Madhya Pradesh in December 2025, enabling Satatgram to explore and subsequently expand its business into the state, an important market for farm mechanization. In August 2026, participation in the Agri-Startup Stakeholder Connect Program in Punjab provided another opportunity to connect with leading cooperative societies and explore collaborations as channel partners. The Satatgram journey demonstrates how MANAGE-CIA initiatives enable sustained engagement with startups while extending access to learning, mentoring, networks, markets and institutional partnerships. What began as participation in a competition evolved into a continuing ecosystem relationship that supported the startup’s capability building, market expansion and partnership development.

During the first Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program held in Himachal Pradesh, four participating startups gained an understanding of MANAGE-CIA's incubation and support mechanisms, with one startup also receiving support from the university to exhibit its innovation on the university campus. Subsequently, the four startups joined the incubation programme, of which three later secured grants under the PM-RKVY scheme. As the initiative expanded across states, nine startups that participated in the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program were incubated at MANAGE-CIA, with five subsequently receiving PM-RKVY grant support totalling ₹60 lakh. These outcomes demonstrate that the programme served as an effective entry point for startups to access institutional support, incubation, opportunities to showcase innovations, and financial assistance.

From Exposure to Expansion: The Shoolini Saffron Journey

The journey of Mr. Gaurav Sabarwal, Founder of Shoolini Saffron Pvt. Ltd. (<https://www.indoorsaffronfarming.com/>), is among the many stories that illustrate how the Agri-Startup Stakeholder Connect Programme served as an important stepping stone for participating startups as they navigated their growth journeys. Founded in August 2022 in Himachal Pradesh, Shoolini Saffron specialises in aeroponic indoor saffron farming. During the early stage of his entrepreneurial journey, Mr. Sabarwal participated in the Agri-Startup Stakeholder Connect Programme held in Himachal Pradesh in February 2024, where he showcased the startup through a stall. The programme introduced him to the MANAGE-CIA incubation ecosystem and its support mechanisms.

Following the programme, Shoolini Saffron joined the SAIP incubation programme at MANAGE-CIA and subsequently received ₹25 lakh grant-in-aid under the PM-RKVY scheme. The incubation support and financial assistance provided momentum to the startup, helping Sabarwal strengthen and expand the business. Since then, the startup has also trained more than 100 farmers in saffron farming and expanded its operations across Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Punjab. The engagement continued beyond the initial programme. During the Agri-Startup Stakeholder Connect Programme in Punjab in August 2026, Sabarwal connected with officials from NABARD and NABI, opening avenues for potential institutional collaborations and future opportunities. The Shoolini Saffron journey demonstrates how the Stakeholder Connect Programme can create sustained pathways from initial exposure to incubation, financial support, capacity building, geographic expansion and institutional linkages enabling startups to translate ecosystem connections into tangible growth and wider impact.

The Way Forward

The MANAGE e-Launch Series and the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program demonstrate that meaningful collaborations are often created not by chance but by deliberately bringing the right people together at the right time. The experience highlights an important lesson for agricultural entrepreneurship support systems. Startups often require more than financial assistance or incubation; they need timely access to research organisations, government departments, investors, markets, extension agencies, FPOs and industry partners. Creating structured platforms where these stakeholders can interact directly helps bridge institutional gaps, accelerate technology adoption, and unlock opportunities that may otherwise remain inaccessible.

As India continues to build one of the world's largest startup ecosystems, the next wave of Agri-startups is emerging from rural villages, smaller towns, districts, and university campuses rather than metropolitan centres alone. Universities and research institutions possess scientific knowledge, infrastructure, and young talent, while incubators provide the support needed to transform promising ideas into viable enterprises. Connecting these strengths with government departments, Farmer Producer Organisations, industry, investors, and markets can contribute significantly to the development of strong regional and local innovation ecosystems. This emerging ecosystem also calls for a rethinking of the role of public and academic institutions in agricultural extension. Rather than viewing extension primarily as a system for transferring technologies and information, there is a growing need to recognise its role in facilitating innovation and entrepreneurship. Supporting Agri-entrepreneurs and startups can enable public and academic institutions to scale locally relevant innovations, strengthen value chains, and expand the reach and effectiveness of the extension system.

The experience of these programmes offers a simple but important lesson: ***Institutions need not wait for a perfect ecosystem to emerge. They can initiate the process by creating purposeful spaces that enable stakeholders to connect, exchange ideas, and work towards shared objectives. Regular and well-structured stakeholder interactions can gradually evolve into partnerships; partnerships can create opportunities, and sustained collaboration around these opportunities can contribute to the development of an innovation ecosystem that supports startups and enterprises.***

"Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success." - Henry Ford

Acknowledgement

The success of the MANAGE e-Launch Series and the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Program has been made possible through the collective efforts of numerous institutions and individuals committed to strengthening India's Agri-startup ecosystem. MANAGE-Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA) sincerely acknowledges the valuable support and collaboration extended by the ICAR institutes, State Agricultural Universities, Agri-business incubators, and other partner institutions that co-organised and hosted these initiatives across different states. We also express our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Government of India; state departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, and allied sectors; researchers, extension professionals, policymakers, financial institutions, investors, industry partners, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), Agri-startup founders, speakers, mentors, exhibitors, participants, and other ecosystem stakeholders whose active participation enriched these platforms and fostered meaningful collaborations.

Finally, we acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the MANAGE-CIA team, whose commitment to planning, coordination, and execution transformed these initiatives into enduring platforms for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and entrepreneurial growth. We hope the experiences shared in this blog encourage more institutions to work together in building a stronger, more connected, and innovation-driven Agri-startup ecosystem in India.

Disclaimer

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MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA)

MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA), hosted at the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, is a recognized Centre of Excellence in Agribusiness Incubation that provides a comprehensive platform for nurturing agri-startups from ideation to commercialization. It offers a robust ecosystem that supports innovation, incubation, mentorship, and capacity building, enabling entrepreneurs to develop sustainable and scalable ventures in agriculture and allied sectors. As a Knowledge Partner under the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana programme, MANAGE-CIA plays a strategic role in strengthening agribusiness incubators across the country by sharing best practices, providing handholding support, and fostering ecosystem development. The centre focuses on promoting innovative solutions to critical challenges in agriculture, thereby generating employment opportunities, enhancing rural livelihoods, and contributing to inclusive economic growth. With a strong national presence, MANAGE-CIA has incubated over 734 agri-startups and mentored more than 1,293 agripreneurs across 26 states and Union Territories, reflecting its significant contribution to advancing India's agri-startup ecosystem.

<https://www.manage.gov.in/managecia/>



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